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MODERN LANGUAGE NOTES.

Baltimore, January, 1896.

DANTE'S TREATMENT OF NATURE IN THE DIVINA COMMEDIA.

FIRST PAPER: HIS CONVENTIONAL TREATMENT OF NATURE.

IN the discussion of any literary topic, the first and all-important question is the establishment of a method. It not seldom occurs in these days of excessive specialization that the laudable desire for thoroughness destroys that sense of proportion which is essential to any literary work. In the discussion, for instance, of such a subject as the treatment of Nature in the *Divina Commedia*, the mere enumeration of the various references to natural phenomena in the poem will tend rather to confuse the mind of the reader than to give him any clear idea of Dante's feeling toward the world of nature. To obtain such an idea only those references must be considered which reveal conscious observation and personal interest on the part of the poet. Hence a preliminary step in any such investigation must be the elimination of all those passages descriptive of Nature which are more or less conventional.¹ By conventionality I mean those figures or metaphors which the poet takes from nature, without seeing himself the actual scene described, or feeling the emotion usually created by it; such metaphors being for the most part directly imitated from previous writers or belonging to the general *Materia poetica* of the times. These figures may often be of extreme beauty, may be in a sense original, in that they produce a certain effect on the mind and imagination of the reader which has never been made before. Such, for example, are the metaphors drawn from Nature in the *Aeneid*, and many of those in *Paradise Lost*.

Now all these may be beautiful and effective, but the important thing to notice is that they have very little to do with Nature herself.

¹ This paper forms part of a more general discussion of *Dante's Treatment of Nature*: hence little is said of that large number of passages in which we have abundant evidence of close observation and deep love for Nature on the part of the Divine Poet.

The charm can only be appreciated by educated readers: the memories that are stirred are those reminiscental of classical studies rather than those which come from the actual object referred to. This is especially true of general, well-known phenomena such as sunset and sunrise. Compare for instance the lines:

La concubina di Titone antico
Già s'imbiancava al balzo d'oriente
Fuor delle braccia del suo dolce amico:
(*Purg.*, ix, 1-3.)

with Vergil:

..... Aut ubi pallida surget
Tithoni croceum linquens Aurora cubile.²
(*Georg.*, i, 446-447.)

Often we find a mingling of personal observation and conventionality in the same passage. Thus the description of the *Paradiso Terrestre* is perhaps the most beautiful in the *Divina Commedia* and one of the loveliest in all literature; yet all the details were common property in the Middle Ages: the flowers springing from the grass, the transparent stream, the grateful shade cast by the murmuring trees, the singing of the birds.³ Compare with the well-known passage of Dante,⁴ the following lines of Walter von der Vogelweide:

Dô der sumer komen was
Und die bluomen dur daz gras
Wünneclîchen sprungen
Aldâ die voege sunen,
Dar kom ich gegangen
An einen anger langen,
Dâ ein lûter brunne entspranc:
Vor dem walde was sîn ganc,
Dâ diu nahtegale sanc.⁵

We find likewise the same details used in a description of a June morning by Robert Henryson, a Scotch poet of the fifteenth cen-

² Cf. also *Aeneid*, ix, 458.

³ I cannot understand what Mr. Ruskin means when he says that Dante's use of birds in this description has been imitated by all following poets. *Modern Painters*, vol. iii, ch. 14.

⁴ *Purg.*, xxviii.

⁵ W. von der Vogelweide, herausgegeben und erklärt von W. Wilmanns, 1883, p. 340.

tury.⁶ Yet the scene described by Dante is taken out of the limits of mere conventionality by the consummate skill with which he uses his material, and by the atmosphere of ineffable poetry with which he has surrounded it. In the following examples from Dante I do not mean to say that often the poet has not given the result of his own observation, but that the reader is more or less reminded of similar scenes elsewhere. In many cases we cannot tell whether a certain description or metaphor is due to mere coincidence or to imitation. No doubt what Washington Irving says of himself in the Preface to the *Tales of a Traveller*,⁷ is true of Dante as well as of every other poet.

Dante was an ardent student of the Classics; he was steeped in the lore of the Bible, and one of the chief aims of art in his day was to follow closely in the footprints of the great masters. It was an age of blind following of authority; an age of imitation, of conventionality, of symbolism.

In the art of painting, the influence of the Byzantine School was still powerful, although Cimabue and Giotto had given it the impulse towards that study of Nature which was fraught with the possibility of infinite development. In literature originality was not sought for; anonymous writers multiplied copies and expansions of old romances, translated the Latin bestiaries and lapidaries, or repeated the eternal rhapsodies of springtime and summer, birds and flowers and ladies fair. Philosophy was summarized in the famous compendium of scholasticism, the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas, and the science of those days comprised only the superstitions and strange stories told of fabulous beasts, marvellous stones and plants, and the wonderful machinery of the Ptolemaic system.

The wonder, then, is not that Dante has so many conventional references to Nature, but that in spite of the artificiality of the times, he gives such striking evidence of close personal observation of the world about him. This

6 Cf. Veitch, *The Feeling for Nature in Scottish Poetry*, vol. i, p. 211.

7 "I am an old traveller; I have read somewhat, heard and seen more, and dreamt more than all. . . . So that when I attempt to draw forth a fact, I cannot determine whether I have read, heard or dreamt it."

wonder is only increased when we compare him with his contemporaries, whose references to Nature are meagre, general and entirely conventional.*

The two main sources from which Dante drew were the Bible and the classical writers. The influence of the former shows itself in various ways. In the first place the poet's whole conception of the relation of Nature and the Universe to God is drawn from Holy Scripture. The frame-work of the world, the scientific and the astronomical conception of it, is due to Ptolemy and the Arabian philosophers; but the God who dwells outside the revolving spheres of Heaven and who directs their movements is the God of the Bible, the Creator and Preserver of all things.

But besides this general influence of the Bible on the structure of the *Divina Commedia*, it has furnished the poet with many figures, metaphors and descriptions. Mr. Shairp has said that language contains fossilized observations of natural phenomena: sky, mountain, river and sea, furnish figures which have become part of the very bone and sinew of speech. In addition to these, however, there are still other figures, drawn from Nature, and of later origin than the first class (which usually date from pre-historic times); these latter were used first by Greek, Latin or Biblical writers; then having frequent repetition, having been introduced into general use, have finally lost the power of calling up any image of Nature, and have become mere rhetorical expressions. Such are many figures drawn from sea or sun, moon or stars. These metaphors are especially frequent in the Biblical writers, and we may assuredly attribute to their influence the large number of examples which are found in Dante.⁸

An interesting example of the symbolic use of Nature is seen in the apple-tree, which stands variously in the *Divina Commedia* for Christ, for Adam, and for the Roman Empire. Thus we find in the *Purgatorio*, where the Trans-

* Walther, *von der Vogelweide* is the greatest of the greatest of Middle High German lyrical poets; and yet the reading of a dozen pages of his poetry will suffice to prove the truth of this statement.

8 Cf., for instance, the constant symbolical use of sun for God, of light for truth, etc.

figuration is alluded to, the Saviour symbolized in the following lines:

Quale a veder li fioretti del melo,
Che del suo pomo gli angeli fa ghiotti.
(xxxii, 73-74.)

The mystic tree in the same canto, which represents the Roman Empire, is also an apple-tree, as may be seen from the exquisite lines in which the peculiarly delicate shade of apple-blossoms is so wonderfully depicted. In the *Paradiso* Adam is addressed as follows:

..... O pomo, che maturo
Solo prodotto fosti, o padre antico.
(xxvi, 91-92.)

While the apple-tree was considered sacred among the Romans,¹⁰ there can be little doubt that Dante took his use of it from the Bible; thus, compare with the above citations the *Song of Solomon* (ii, 3):—

"As the apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste."

The literary or symbolical use of the lamb for innocence, the wolf for rapacity, will be treated later in connection with Vergil. Let it suffice in this place to mention the resemblance of the first canto in the *Inferno*, where Dante is driven back from the mountain by the wolf, the lion and the panther, with Jeremiah, chap. v, v. 6:

"A lion out of the forest shall slay them, and a wolf of the evenings shall spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities."

The classical writers exerted a strong and direct influence on Dante's thought and style. Homer, Plato, Aristotle were known to him only through Latin translations or quotations in other writers. His acquaintance with Latin literature, however, considering the difficulty

9 Men che di rose e più che di viole
Colore aprendo.
(*Purg.*, xxxii, 58-59.)

¹⁰ The apple was sacred to Venus, whose statues sometimes bore a poppy in one hand and an apple in the other. To dream of apples was deemed by lovers of good omen.

¹¹ In the *Jeu de Robin et de Marion* by Adam de la Halle, Robin says to Marion:

Et si t'aport des pommes: tien.
(Constans, *Chrest. de l'Anc. Franç.*, p. 229, line 109.)

of pursuing study during the Middle Ages was marvellous.

Calculations have been made of the reference in Dante's works to the classical writers, and it has been found that

"the Vulgate is quoted or referred to more than 500 times, Aristotle more than 300, Vergil about 200, Ovid about 100, Cicero, and Lucan about fifty each, Statius and Boethius between thirty and forty each, Horace, Livy and Orosius between ten and twenty each; with a few scattered references, probably not exceeding ten in the case of any one author, to Homer, Juvenal, Seneca, Ptolemy, Æsop and St. Augustine."¹²

Among the mass of quotations we may naturally expect to find a number which refer to Nature.

These authors, in the first place, tinged Dante's view of Nature with a learned and classic atmosphere; on seeing, for instance, some phase of Nature, his mind would instantly recur to some passage of Vergil or Ovid, and it is this fact he tells us about, rather than that he describes simply the actual details of the scene in question.

Again, although mythology as a religion had died out, it still lives on in the *Divina Commedia* as a means of ornament and illustration:—often in the strangest kind of juxtaposition with Christianity, and we hear even the Almighty himself addressed as "Sommo Giove." As we wander over the supernatural world of Dante, we meet constantly with naiad, nymph, and river-god; fabulous monsters are seen on every side: harpies, dragons, Centaurs, Cerberus, Pluto, the Minotaur. Of course Dante's use of these is entirely different from that of Homer or even that of Vergil and Ovid; it is purely literary and finds its analogy in France during the seventeenth century, when Boileau inculcates their use as necessary to an elegant style.¹³

The poet whose influence Dante felt most in his discriptions of Nature (as in everything else) is Vergil; that he knew the Æneid almost by heart is proved, not only by evidence, but by his own express statements.¹⁴ There

¹² See *Edinburgh Review* for April, 1895, p. 286; cf. also *Jahrbücher für Philologie und Pädagogik*, ii. Abth., xi. Jahrg., p. 253.

¹³ *L'Art Poétique*, iii, 160 and ff.

¹⁴ *Inf.*, i, 83-87: xx, 114; and *Purg.*, xxi, 97-98.

can be no doubt that the *Divina Commedia* is saturated with not only the incidents and ideas, but even the diction of Vergil. The number of direct quotations is very large, but besides these there are innumerable passages which show an unconscious, or only half conscious imitation. This influence is seen at work in the description of morning and evening, in the constant reference to mythology, and in the many metaphors drawn from animal life. In certain cases, even if we cannot point to any direct imitation, it is evident that Dante's view has been colored by Vergil. As an instance of the above statements, take the metaphorical use of sheep and wolf; while in this respect Dante follows not only the Bible, but also the traditions of Greek, Roman and Mediaeval literature,¹⁵ we find in particular some very striking imitations of Vergil. Compare, for instance, the following lines:

Ed una lupa, che di tutte brame
Semiava carca.....
(*Inf.*, i, 49-50.)

with those of Vergil:

..... Collecta fatigat edendi
Ex longo rabies et siccae sanguine fauces.
(*Æn.*, ix, 63-64.)

The references to sheep as symbolical of the followers of Christ and to the wolf in sheep's clothing, for false teachers are, of course, Scriptural in their origin.

Homer and Vergil in their pictures of rural life often introduce the farmer or shepherd as a witness of the phenomena described, and there are several passages in the *Divina Commedia* which show the same treatment.

Compare:

.....Aut rapidus montano flumine torrens
Sternit agros, sternit sata laeta boumque
labores
Praecipitesque trahit silvas, stupet inscius alto

¹⁵ The wolf is everywhere mentioned with hate: Vergil's words:

"Triste lupus stabulis"
(*Eclog.*, iii, 80)

are typical of both the Greek and Roman and of the Mediaeval view of the rapacity of that restless enemy of the sheep: always fierce, famished, prowling around the sheep-fold. In Homer the lion shares with the wolf the fears and hostility of the shepherds.

Accipiens sonitum saxi de vertice pastor,¹⁶
(*Æn.*, ii, 305-308.)

and:

Non altrimenti fatto, che d'un vento
Impetuoso per gli avversi ardori,
Che fier la selva, e senza alcun rattento
Gli rami schianta, abbatte, e porta fuori;
Dinanzi polveroso va superbo,
E fa fuggir le fiere ed i pastori.
(*Inf.*, ix, 67-72.)

In similar manner the farmer is seen filled with dismay in that realistic scene in the *Inferno*, xxiv, 4 and ff., where the heavy frost looks like snow in the morning and threatens to bring ruin to the crops.

The influence of Vergil is further shown in the references to other animals. Take for instance the passage descriptive of a wounded bull:

Quale quel toro, che si slaccia in quella
C'ha ricevuto lo colpo mortale,
Che gir non sa, ma qua e là saltella,
(*Inf.*, xii, 22-24.)

and compare it with:

Qualis mugitus, fugit cum saucius aram
Taurus et incertam excussit cervice securim.
(*Æn.*, ii, 223-224.)

So the boar chased by dogs:

Similmente a colui, che venire
Sente'l porco e la caccia alla sua posta,
Ch'ode le bestie, e le frasche stormire
(*Inf.*, xiii, 112-114.)

reminds us of Vergil's lines:

Ac velut ille canum morsu de montibus altis
Actus aper:.....
(*Æn.*, x, 706-707.)

Of course it is not in my province to discuss at length this whole question of Dante's indebtedness to Vergil; I simply point out some

¹⁶ Cf. also:

Qual istordito e stupido aratore,
Poi ch'è passato il fulmine, si leva
Di là dove l'altissimo fragore
Presso alli morti buoi steso l'aveva.
(Ariosto, *Orl. Fur.*, i, 65. 1-4.)

and:

Lorsque le laboureur, regagnant sa chaumière,
Trouve le soir son champ rasé par le tonnerre,
Il croit d'abord qu'un rêve a fasciné ses yeux.
(A. de Musset, *Lettre à Lamartine.*)

of the most striking resemblances, without seeking to make a complete list of them. I may be allowed, however, to refer to what may be more properly designated as verbal resemblances in the references to Nature. The detailed description of a storm in *Purg.* v, 113 and ff.¹⁷ finds a counterpart in several passages of Vergil and Ovid; but there seems to be something more than mere coincidence in the resemblance between the lines:

La pioggia cadde; ed a' fossati venne
Di lei ciò che la terra non sofferse,
(*Purg.*, v, 119-120.)

and Vergil's

....Implentur fossae et cava flumina crescunt.
(*Georg.*, i, 326.)

The line:

.....Il tremolar della marina,
(*Purg.*, i, 117.)

finds a parallel in

.....Splendet tremulo sub lumine pontus.
(*Aen.*, vii, 9.)

So the lines in *Inf.* ii, 1 ff., where the approach of night brings the hour of rest for men and animals:

Lo giorno se n'andava, e l'aer bruno
Toglieva gli animai, che sono in terra,
Dalle fatiche loro.....
(*Inf.*, ii, 1-3.)

recall similar lines in Vergil:

Cetera per terras omnis animalia somno
Laxabant curas et corda oblita laborum,
(*Aen.*, ix, 222-223.)

and:

Nox erat et terris animalia somnus habebat.
(*Aen.*, iii, 147.)

The phenomenon of the stars fading at the approach of dawn is common enough and we need not be surprised to find parallels to the *Divina Commedia*, *Par.*, xxx, 7 and ff., not only in Vergil (*Aen.*, iii, 521), but also in Lucan (ii, 72), Homer (x.), Ariosto (xxxvii, 86) and Tasso (xviii, 12).¹⁸

Some of the most famous of Dante's pictures, although in large part made original by

¹⁷ Mr. Ruskin says of this description that there is nothing like it in all literature. *Modern Painters*.

¹⁸ Cf. Magistretti, *Il Fuoco e la Luce nella Divina Commedia*. Firenze, 1888.

his own genius, are evidently reminiscences of Vergil. This is especially true of the exquisite figure of the doves in the *Inf.* v. 82-84, whose prototype is *Aen.*, v. 213-217; and also of the famous metaphor of the souls preparing to enter Charon's boat, (*Inf.*, iii; 112-114, reproducing the same idea as that in the *Aen.*, vi, 309-312).

But Dante owes suggestions for metaphors taken from Nature to other Latin writers. Although his references to Horace are few, we find a repetition of the latter's famous figure of words and leaves (*Ars. Poet.*, 60-62), in

Ché l'uso de' mortali è come fronda
In ramo, che sen va, ed altra viene.
(*Par.*, xxvi, 137-138.)

In similar manner we find several metaphors of Nature which are evidently suggested by Ovid. As already noted the direct and indirect references to this poet in all of Dante's works amount to about a hundred. For his mythology Dante is chiefly indebted to him, and nearly all the allusions to Cerberus, Phoenix, and the gods and goddesses can be traced to the *Metamorphoses*. Portions of the beautiful scene in *Purg.* xxviii, 40 and ff. may have been suggested by the story of Proserpina in *Met.*, v. 388 ff. Cf. especially the lines:

Una Donna soletta, che si già
Cantando ed iscegliendo fior da fiore,
(xxviii, 40-41.)

with

..... Quo dum Proserpina luco
Ludit et aut violas aut candida lilia carpit.
(v. 391-392.)

The words *primaver* and *perpetuum ver*, which are found in these passages, may be taken as indicating some connection between the two.

It is probable that Dante also had Ovid in mind when he tells us how the Earth looked when seen from a starry sphere:—

L'aiuola
.....
Tutta m'apparve da' colli alle foci.¹⁹
(*Par.*, xxii, 151-153.)

In the *Metamorphoses* there are several

¹⁹ Cf. also *Par.*, xxvii. 77 and ff.

similar passages,—chief among which is that where unlucky Phaëthon is described:

.....Medio est altissima caelo,
Unde mare et terras ipsi mihi saepe videre.
(*Met.*, ii, 64-65.)

So also the scene where Perseus flies through the sky and

Despectat terras totumque supervolat orbem;
(*Met.*, iv, 623.)

and the line:

Quae freta, quas terras sub se vidisset ab alto.
(*Met.*, iv, 786.)

The various scenes of the transformation of snakes into men, and *vice versa*, are imitated from Ovid.

A very interesting verbal resemblance is seen in the line in which the dim light of the eighth circle is described, as

.....Men che notte e men che giorno,
(*Inf.*, xxxi, 10.)

with which compare:

Quod tu nec tenebras nec posses dicere lucem.
(*Met.*, iv, 400.)

I have already compared the famous figure of the leaves in the *Inferno* to Vergil, but a similar figure is also seen in:

Non citius frondes autumnus frigore tactas
Iamque male haerentes alta rapit arbore ventus,
Quam sunt membra viri manibus direpta nefandis.
(*Met.*, iii, 729-731.)

So, too, of a falling star we find:

Di prima notte mai fender sereno,
(*Purg.*, v, 38.)

whilst Phaëthon falls:

.....Ut interdum de caelo stella sereno.²⁰
(*Met.*, ii, 321.)

The tumbling of the dolphins, described as:

²⁰ This is a very common metataphor; cf.

Quam solet aethereo lampas decurrere sulco,
(*Lucan*, x.)

and also:

..... And with the setting sun
Dropt from the Zenith like a falling star.
(*Milton, Par. Lost*, i, 744-745.)

For other parallels see Magistretti, *l. c.*, pp. 300-301.

Come i delfini, quando fanno segno

A' marinar con l'arco della schiena,

(*Inf.*, xxii, 19-20.)

finds a parallel in:

.....Nec se super aequora curvi
Tollere consuetas audent delphines in auras.
(*Met.*, ii, 265-266.)

So the *pianta senza seme* spoken of in *Purg.*, xxviii, 117, may have been suggested by the *natos sine semine flores* of Ovid, *Met.*, i, 108.

Now it may be that these resemblances (and many others which might be mentioned) are mere coincidences; but we must remember that Dante knew Vergil and Ovid thoroughly, and it may well be that in all the above cases he was influenced more or less consciously by them.

But when we have discussed the influence of the Bible and the classics on Dante, we have not yet exhausted the subject of his conventionality. He was as ardent a scientist as scholar, philosopher, theologian and poet, and there is a wonderful blending of science and poetry in many of his descriptions of Nature.²¹ We should naturally expect, then, to find him influenced by the books of science of his day. In Zoology and Mineralogy these were the Bestiaries and Lapidaries. It is possible that he had read in French the famous Bestiaries of Philippe de Thaün and Guillaume le Clerc.²² But even if he was not acquainted with these popular treatises, he certainly had read the *Trésor* of his master Brunetto Latini, for the last words which came to Dante from the "dear, paternal image" of him who had taught him *come l'uom s'eterna*, were:

Sieti raccomandato il mio Tesoro,

Nel quale i' vivo ancora.....

(*Inf.*, xv, 119-120.)

It is extremely interesting to compare what Dante says of the Phoenix, the Dragon, the Eagle, and other animals, with the description given by Brunetto. Although Dante obtained his ideas of the Phoenix from Ovid, he may have

²¹ I have discussed at length this most interesting phase of Dante's treatment of Nature (which has hitherto, I believe, escaped attention) in my general discussion of this whole subject.

²² See Reinsch, *Le Bestiaire von Guillaume le Clerc*, p. 44.

still been affected by the descriptions given in the bestiaries. Likewise to them many de tails of the more common beasts may be due; as, for instance, the picture of the eagle gazing fixedly into the sun:

Aquila sì non gli s'affisse unquanco.²³
(*Par.*, i. 48.)

whilst Brunetto's description is:

Et sa nature est de esgarder contre le soleil
si fermement que si oil ne remuent goutte.
(*Trésor*, i. 5, 97.)

There seems scarcely any doubt that the passage already cited,

Come i delfini, quando fanno segno
A' marinar con l'arco della schiena,
(*Inf.*, xxii. 19-20.)

was also influenced by the following description:

Et par eulx (dolphins) aperçoivent li marinier
la tempeste qui doit venir, quant il voient le
dolphin fuir parmi la mer.
(*Trésor*, p. 187.)

Compare also the following resemblances:

E come i gru van cantando lor lai,
Facendo in aer di sè lunga riga,
(*Inf.*, v. 46-47.)

and:

Grues sont oisiau qui volent a eschieles, en
maniere de chevaliers qui vont en bataille.
(*Trésor*, p. 215.)

Sì come quando 'l colombo si pone

Presso al compagno, l'uno all'altro pande,
Girando e mormorando, l'affezione,
(*Par.*, xxv, 19-21.)

and:

E sachiez que la torterele est si amables
vers son compaignon, etc.²⁴

(*Trésor*, p. 220.)

Com'io fui di natura buona scimia,
(*Inf.*, xxix, 139.)

²³ Cipolla (*Studi. Danteschi*, p. 6) quotes this passage as indicative of observation on the part of the poet; but the reference in question seems to me merely rhetorical and conventional.

²⁴ The affection of the turtle-dove is frequently alluded to in poetry; cf.:

Like to a pair of loving turtle-doves
That could not live asunder day or night,
(Shakspeare, *I Henry IV*, ii. 2.)

and also *Winter's Tale*, iv. 4; and *Troilus and Cressida*, iii. 2.

and:

Singes est une beste qui volontiers contre
fait ce que elle voit faire as homes.

(*Trésor*, p. 250.)

..... Per la qual vedessi

Non altrimenti che per pelle talpe.

(*Purg.*, xvii. 2-3.)

and:

Et sachiez que taupe ne voit goutte, car
nature ne volt pas ovrir la pel qui est sor ses
oilz.

(*Trésor*, p. 252.)

Dante's use of the panther is not taken from the bestiaries, where it is used symbolically for the Saviour, but rather from the leopard of the Bible, swift, subtle, fierce against men.

Besides these well-known sources there are others which are obscure or even wholly unknown to us, and certain passages in Dante are mere repetitions of general ideas and metaphors common to the Middle Ages.

To this class belong the following parallels:
Plus tost c'uns alerions (referring to an eagle),
(Chrétien de Troyes, *Chev. au Lion*.)

and:

Poi mi pareo che, più rotata un poco,
Terribil come folgor discendesse,
(*Purg.*, ix, 28-29.)

Fiers par sanblant come lions,
(Chrétien de Troyes, *Ibid.*)

and:

A guisa di leon, quando si posa.
(*Purg.*, vi, 66.)

In his treatment of the animal world, Dante must also have been influenced by fables and the beast epic, both of which were so popular and wide-spread in the Middle Ages. Whether he knew personally the works of such writers as Marie de France and Walter of England, or not, it is at least evident that he was familiar with the subject matter of the fables which they treated. In the Middle Ages the names of Æsop and Romulus were given to almost all collections of fables; in fact these names had become traditional, just as Faust and Don Juan have become so in later times. Hence Dante, in alluding to the well-known fable of the *Frog and the Rat*, attributes it to Æsop:

Vôlto era in su la favola d'Isopo

Lo mio pensier, per la presente rissa,
Dov' ei parlò della rana e del topo.
(*Inf.*, xxiii, 4-6.)

Proverbs, too, furnished Dante with supposed characteristics of animal life. Thus we have the thoughtlessness of birds alluded to in the following lines:

Come fe il merlo per poca bonaccia,²⁵
(*Purg.*, xiii, 123.)

and

Nuovo augelletto due o tre aspetta.
(*Purg.*, xxxi, 61.)

Finally, the traditional characteristics of the cat and the mouse are alluded to in:

Tra male gatte era venuto 'l sorco.
(*Inf.*, xxii, 58.)

Dante's reference to the cold nature of Saturn:

Nell'ora che non può 'l calor diurno
Intiepidar più 'l freddo della Luna,
Vinto da Terra, e talor da Saturno;
(*Purg.*, xix, 1-3.)

while probably more directly connected with that of Brunetto Latini:

Quar Saturnus, qui est le souverains sor touz,
est cruex et felons et de froide nature,
(*Trésor*, p. 128.)

nevertheless represents a widespread belief of the day, as is proved by the following passages from other writers:

Frigida Saturni sese quo stella receptet,
(Vergil, *Georg.*, i, 336.)

Stella Jovis temeratae naturae est. Media enim fertur inter frigidicam Saturni et aestiosam Marti;

(Claudius Ptolemaeus, as cited by Magistretti) and we even find Saturn alluded to as *cal-
isig tungol* in the Anglo-Saxon *Metra* xxiv.²⁶

There are a number of very interesting verbal resemblances between Dante and other Mediaeval writers, by whom he could not

²⁵ Cf. Fraticelli, *in loc.*:

"Un' antica novella popolare diceva che un merlo, sentendo nel gennaio mitigato il freddo, credè finito l'inverno, e fuggissi dal padrone cantando: 'Domine, più non ti curo, ch'è uscito son dal verno'; ma presto se ne pentì, perchè il freddo ricominciò, e così conobbe che quel po' di bonaccia non era la primavera."

²⁶ See Lüning, *Die Natur in der Altgermanischen und Mittelhochdeutschen Epik*, p. 66.

have been in any way influenced. If these resemblances are not mere coincidences, they can be due only to the wide-spread use of conventional figures and metaphors. Perhaps the most interesting of these coincidences is the use of the sea by Dante to represent the *Divina Commedia* in the *Paradiso*, ii, l. and ff. We find exactly the same figure used by Otfrid:

Nu will ih thes giffizan, then segal nitharlazan,
Thaz in thes stâdes feste min ruader nu gir-
êste.²⁷

(*Evangelienbuch*, xxv, 5-6.)

So, too, the passage describing the bird waiting for the coming of the dawn:

E con ardente affeto il sole aspetta,
Fiss guardando, pur che l'alsa nasca,
(*Par.*, xxiii, 8-9.)

finds a parallel in Middle-High-German poetry:

..... So vroeut sich mîn gemüete, sam diu
kleinen

Vôgellîn, so sie sehent den morgenschîn;
(*Ms.* ii, 102b.)

ih warte der vrouwen mîn, reht alse des tags
die kleinen vôgellîn.²⁸

(HMS. i, 21a.)

One of the most beautiful lines in the *Divina Commedia*:

Par tremolando mattutina stella,
(*Purg.*, xii, 90.)

suggests similar passages from a variety of sources; thus in the *Vulgate* we find the words:

Ego sum radix et genus David, stella splendida et matutina.

(*Apocalypsis*, xxii, 16.)

and in the Middle-High-German lines below, Karl's eyes are said to shine like the morning-star:

Ia lûhten sîn ougen sam ther morgensterre.²⁹
(*Rolandslied*, 686-687.)

²⁷ Cf. also Vergil, *Georg.*, iv, 116-117.

²⁸ See Lüning, *l. c.*, p. 39; cf. also:

Non dormatz plus, qu'en aug chantar l'auzel
Que vai queren lo jorn per lo boscatge.

(Guirautz de Borneill.)

²⁹ See Lüning, *l. c.*, p. 17. So, too, does the Scotch poet William Dunbar sing of the *goldyn candill matutyne* (see Veitch, *l. c.*, vol. 1, p. 226). Tasso also makes a beautiful use of this figure in the well-known passage in the *Gerusalemme Liberata*, xv, 60.

I have thus discussed (at too great length, perhaps) what I have called the Conventional Treatment of Nature in the *Divina Commedia*. My object, however, has not been to deny Dante's claim to be considered a close observer and a genuine lover of nature; for this I believe to be true of him in an eminent degree, and I fully concur in the opinions of Burckhardt and Humboldt, who consider him to be the first poet to show the modern appreciation of the world in which we live. The object of the present paper has been merely to clear the way for a more intelligent discussion of Nature in the *Divina Commedia*.

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QUANTITY MARKS IN OLD-ENGLISH MSS.

THE use of symbols for the purpose of showing vowel length in O.E. manuscript writing has never been subjected to an exhaustive examination. This has been due to a great extent to the fact that our knowledge of the quantity of vowels in O.E. depends by no means exclusively on this ancient system of vowel notation. Nevertheless these marks have their importance for students of Old English,—were evidently intended in most cases to illustrate the application of certain phonetic laws, and therefore deserve careful study and consideration.

The best short study of O.E. quantity-marks has been given us by Henry Sweet in his *History of English Sounds* (2nd ed., London, 1888, pp. 107 ff.). But Sweet directs his attention to only a few of the most important prose MSS., leaving the field of poetry entirely untouched. Prof Arnold Schröer has given the subject of the quantity of vowels of the O.E. Version of the Benedictine Rule thorough consideration in his excellent edition of the same (*Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa*, ii). In his *Doctor-Arbeit* the writer has devoted one entire chapter to the quantity-marks of the MS. of King Alfred's *Blooms*. Here the accented vowels are alphabetically arranged in groups, and an attempt is made to draw cer-

tain conclusions as to their significance in this text.

As a basis for the present study, materials have been gathered by a personal examination of several MSS. in the British Museum and the Bodleian Library, and of a large number of facsimiles and diplomatic texts, embracing together the majority of the masterpieces of O.E. literature, poetry as well as prose.

Old-English scribes knew two ways of indicating long vowels in their MS. writing: (1) by doubling the vowel; (2) by placing a mark over the long vowel. The first method was used in the oldest extant MSS., and was kept up to some extent throughout the O.E. period; that is, till about the close of the eleventh century. The use of accents for showing vowel length does not seem to have come into vogue before the eighth century, the earliest instances being in the Corpus Gloss of first half of eighth century. This accent mark is the "apex" of Latin inscriptions and was, according to Sweet (p. 108), written upwards; that is, with an upward stroke of the pen. The lower end of the mark is always pointed, the upper being finished with a "tag," as a rule,—but sometimes having the appearance of a heavy pen stroke. In some MSS. the scribes give a slight downward curvature to the upper end of the stroke before adding the characteristic tag, thus giving the mark a hooked appearance. This peculiar mark seems to have been the only one in general use, but in some of the later MSS. of the O.E. period, for example in that of the *Blooms*, which belongs to the beginning of the twelfth century (cf. Hulme, *Einkl.* p. 3 and pp. 97 f.), a simple stroke resembling the acute accent and extending almost perpendicularly upward from the vowel is frequently employed in the beginning of the MS. Moreover the horizontal wave mark or unrolled scroll which is regularly used in O.E. MSS. to indicate an abbreviation is now and then employed by the scribe of the *Blooms* to show vowel length.

For convenience sake the material examined for this paper may be arranged in three divisions, no account having been taken of MSS. and texts later than the O.E. period, properly speaking. These three divisions are: (1) Glosses, Inscriptions, and Charters; (2) Prose

¹ Die Sprache der Altenglischen Bearbeitung der Soliloquien Augustins, von W. H. Hulme. Darmstadt, 1894.